

Senate Bill 1054, An Act Concerning Students with Dyslexia

From Jessica Glassman

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I am speaking in support of Senate Bill 1054, An Act Concerning Students with Dyslexia. I am requesting changes/additions to be made to this bill to include early screening and identification of dyslexia and proper interventions for dyslexic students.

I am an educator and parent of a dyslexic son. I live in Orange, Connecticut. The district has a good reputation for educating students but has been very disappointing in educating my son with learning challenges. I have faced resistance from school staff in recognizing my son's disability and giving him the proper interventions.

Starting mid-kindergarten, I realized that something was not right. At parent-teacher conferences, the teacher told me that my son couldn't read many sight words. Here was a bright child who had all of the pre-requisites needed for kindergarten, now stuck at a beginning kindergarten reading level. I appealed to the school for help and had him tested privately. By my request, tier 2 quickly turned to tier 3. He was diagnosed with a reading disability by the end of kindergarten, but the school refused the PPT request, saying there wasn't enough time left in the school year. I left the principal that day confused and disappointed. The following year I asked for a PPT again. It took the school conducting educational testing, a second independent evaluation paid for by the school, a lot of persistence and many PPT meetings to get him identified as a child with a disability. I was asked by one team member at the PPT, "Why would you want your child to be identified as special ed?" Finally at the end of first grade he qualified for an IEP. Second and third grade had well intentioned teachers giving Adam what he didn't need. They tried but they didn't understand his disability and didn't gear interventions toward his learning style. Adam left third grade reading well below grade level and testing below basic on the reading portion of the Connecticut Mastery Test. Through the years teachers told me Adam was bright and if he tried a little harder he would do better. They were right about his ability but trying harder won't make a difference for a dyslexic child. What they didn't understand is my child was putting in more effort than his peers to compensate for his disability and appear to "be like everyone else". My son was diagnosed dyslexic at the end of third grade when I brought him back to the doctor. He still wasn't catching up to his peers, despite the school's efforts. By fourth grade, after I was able to prove my child wasn't making sufficient progress, the school hired an Orton Gillingham instructor and provided some assistive technology. My son is now in fifth grade and I still have to fight for his educational needs. I monitor his progress through the school's progress monitoring. The Orton Gillingham instructor was the best thing to happen for my child. He has made progress and is more

confident than before. She tailors his learning to his needs. Using the iPad to “ear read” has enabled my son to read books way above his “eye reading” capabilities. He now has a love for reading. Some nights I have to yell at him to put the book away, instead of the old battle of taking out a book to read - a problem I much prefer. Getting my son the proper accommodations and assistive technology applications is still a work in progress. Also getting the teachers to understand the way a dyslexic child learns is still a challenge. Some teachers still consider “ear reading” cheating and feel Adam doesn’t “need” accommodations.

Parents shouldn’t have to fight so hard to get their dyslexic children an appropriate education. Early screening would identify children with dyslexia and help teachers provide children with what they need at an early age. There is research to support early intervention as the key to school success. It is much harder to catch a child up later in their educational career. It would cost schools less money to intervene properly when the children are young. Research shows that if a child doesn’t read on grade level by 3rd grade, his/her chances of ever catching up greatly decline. Poor reading affects children’s ability to do science, social studies, literacy and even math. Children who struggle in the upper grades often give up and become disruptive in class or drop out of school. These bright children deserve a chance to succeed. We can give them this chance by early proper intervention.

In our own state, the leading research on dyslexia is being done at Yale. Through extensive research and MRI brain scans, the researchers found that the dyslexic brain can be changed with proper interventions. Even though the research has proven this, it is not used in the one place that affects our kids most...SCHOOL! Schools are not equipped to teach our children using this multisensory approach. Orton Gillingham is one of the most effective techniques to help dyslexic students, yet most Connecticut schools don’t have certified instructors. Our children deserve to be taught using a style that is meant for their brains, not the one size fits all approach most schools use.

Teachers are on the front lines with our children every day. One of the first steps in helping our children is getting teachers to understand dyslexia. Professional development is needed for all staff members that play a role in educating our children. Teachers shouldn’t think of our dyslexic students as lazy or stupid, but bright and creative. They need to know the correct approaches to meet our children’s needs. 1 in 5 students is dyslexic; that is a lot of students not reaching their full potential each day.

I think it is great that the dyslexia legislation was passed last year. However, as a teacher I have seen great confusion amongst my colleagues as to what should be done with this box. Teachers don’t understand dyslexia or how to intervene. This is a major reason why we need this current legislation passed, with some additions. I recently attended an initial PPT on one of my students that has the profile of a dyslexic student, yet the dyslexia box on the IEP

wasn't even considered because the staff didn't have a definition. School PPT members don't know much about dyslexia and a lot of the information they do know is incorrect. I have been asked by other staff members if dyslexics see things backwards. As a teacher, I know information about dyslexia because I read and research on my own. This isn't the case with most teachers. The box needs to be clarified with a definition and added to with early screening and interventions, so we can truly help our dyslexic students.

Our bright, creative children deserve the same educational opportunities as their non-dyslexic peers. They are our future doctors, lawyers, engineers, actors, legislators... I ask that you please help our dyslexic children have a brighter future by supporting and passing Senate Bill 1054, An Act Concerning Special Education.